

SSCI'S TIMIDITY ON TRUMP TOWER MOSCOW

The SSCI Report on Russia is better, in some ways, than I expected (though weak in others).

But on a key issue – the multiple Trump Tower deals floated during the course of the election – it is inexcusably timid.

The report lays out the three offers we know from the Mueller Report:

- A Trump Tower deal negotiated through Felix Sater, involving sanctioned banks and GRU-linked middle men and the involvement of people close to Putin
- A deal brokered by Georgian-American Giorgi Rtskhiladze that included buy-off from the Mayor of Moscow
- Outreach – in which Ivanka was a party – from the Director of a large energy company, Dmitry Klovov, which was tied to a meeting with Putin

Along the way, the report notes that Felix Sater (whose colorful background it lays out) was not entirely forthcoming even in his April 4, 2018 interview, long after he appears to have cleaned up some discrepancies with the Mueller team (though his later Mueller 302s have been withheld, in part for source endangerment issues, and it's not clear the committee obtained them). Specifically, Sater was not clear who was involved in scheduling a possible trip for Cohen in December 2015, Felix Shmykov (who had ties to GRU) or Felix Dvoskin (who had

ties to FSB and ran a bank operating in Crimea).

Sater told the Committee that although he never had direct communication with Kostin, Kostin was indirectly contacted about the project “through people in Moscow.”²⁷¹⁹ Sater recalled that a contact in Moscow, whom he identified only as “Danny,” “indicated that he [Danny] spoke to people at VTB and that they would be on board.”²⁷²⁰ Sater also told the Committee that he used Evgeny Shmykov, the former Russian intelligence officer, as a conduit to VTB.²⁷²¹

[snip]

On December 19, 2015, Sater emailed and sent a text message to Cohen requesting that Cohen call him because he had “Evgeny on the other line.”²⁷⁷⁸ Sater told the Committee in his interview prior to the release of the SCO Report that his references to Evgeny were, to his recollection, Evgeny Shmykov. According to the SCO, however, Sater’s reference to “Evgeny” on the December 19 message was a reference to Evgeny Dvoskin, who at the time was associated with a Russian bank operating in Crimea.²⁷⁷⁹ Through counsel, Sater later represented to the Committee that he may have used both Shmykov and Dvoskin at varying times.²⁷⁸⁰ As a result, while this particular outreach appears to involve Dvoskin, the identity behind Sater’s other references to “Evgeny” remains unclear.

(U) Dvoskin is strongly connected to Russian organized crime and the Russian intelligence services, particularly the FSB.²⁷⁸¹

There’s no unredacted discussion of whether Cohen was asked about the wisdom of pitching real estate deals with people involved in

Russian intelligence. He was, however, asked about the wisdom of pitching real estate deals with sanctioned banks.

He didn't much care.

As noted infra, both VTB Bank and GenBank were sanctioned by the U.S. Government under its Ukraine-related sanctions program targeting Russian government-connected entities. Cohen was unaware of these sanctions targeting either bank, and stated that, in addition, it "didn't matter to me" whether the banks were sanctioned. Cohen explained that he believed the Russian developer, not the Trump Organization, would be responsible for financing the deal, and thus Cohen did not think that any sanctions "would have been a problem."

And while the report twice laid out that the committee did not receive key emails showing high level Russian involvement in the deal, it didn't chase down Cohen's claim that Trump Organization managed that document request, not even when the report elsewhere admits that other documents were withheld from Trump Organization.

(U) On other matters, multiple emails between Michael Cohen and Russian government officials-which were responsive to the Committee's document request-were never produced to the Committee. The withheld emails included outreach to the Kremlin's press office seeking to speak with Putin's chief of staff, Sergei Ivanov, as well as a response from Dmitri Peskov's assistant seeking to discuss the Trump Moscow project. During Cohen's initial interview, , Cohen's then-counsel Stephen Ryan told the Committee that Cohen was not involved in the production of documents to the Committee.³⁰⁰⁹ Ryan stated that Cohen's emails from his

Trump Organization account were produced to Cohen and his counsel by the Trump Organization "off the Trump [Organization] server."³⁰¹⁰ During that same interview, Cohen made false statements to the Committee about these communications with Russian government officials.³⁰¹¹ Cohen also transmitted his false statements about his outreach to the Kremlin on the project to the press and to the public generally; giving the false impression that Cohen had not communicated in a substantive way with the Russian government regarding the project.³⁰¹²

(U) Cohen eventually pleaded guilty to making intentionally false statements to this Committee and to the HPSCI related to the Trump Tower project.³⁰¹³ Cohen eventually admitted to receiving an email response from a Russian government employee; ultimately, he admitted contacting her and conducting a substantive conversation about the Trump Moscow project in January 2016.³⁰¹⁴ Cohen told the Committee that the email response, which he never produced to the Committee, was never provided to him by the Trump Organization, another member of the alleged JDA.³⁰¹⁵ The Committee was unable to determine the accuracy of this claim. However, if true, this lends support to the conclusion that Cohen's initial false statements to the Committee were aided by other members of the alleged IDA, namely the Trump Organization.

The report *also* doesn't address (as it does in the WikiLeaks section) Trump's demonstrable lies about Trump Tower, even though those lies are even more clear cut than his lies on WikiLeaks. After Trump claimed to have no recollection of any of this, he went out to the press and said stuff that made it clear he had very clear

recollections about the real estate deals he was negotiating while running for President.

In addition to the three well known deals, the SSCI Report describes a fourth, one pitched by Boris Epshteyn to Eric Trump.

Virtually the entire description of this deal is redacted in the report, suggesting either that it's something Trump has ongoing interest in covering up or it's something that the Intelligence Community believes has sensitive counterintelligence import.

In addition to the Epshteyn to Eric Trump channel, however, three details are not redacted:

Like the Rtskhiladze pitch, this one included involvement from the Moscow city government.

In the spring of 2016, Epshteyn received the proposal from contacts he had in the Moscow city government, and shared it with Eric Trump, with whom Epshteyn had long been friends.

[snip]

In early 2016, these same individuals affiliated with the Moscow city government reengaged Epshteyn about a potential Trump deal in Russia, ultimately sending him blueprints for a hotel.²⁹⁹⁸ According to the email chain produced by Epshteyn, the blueprints originated with a secretary for Cheremin in April 2016. Cheremin's secretary forwarded the plans to an email address that included the name Shutenko, likely affiliated with Oleg Shutenko, Cheremin's deputy in the Moscow city government.²⁹⁹⁹

According to a heavily redacted bullet, it appears to involve two people thrown out of the US in 2018 as part of sanctions imposed after the Skripal assassinations, which may suggest they were believed to be spies.

[redacted]

Tarazov and Standik were later declared *persona non grata* in 2018 by the United States.²⁹⁸⁸

[redacted]

Finally, the deal had some tie to Rossotrudnichestvo, an NGO implicated in the false claims about a Michael Cohen meeting in Prague.

²⁹⁹⁰ (U) *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50; rs.gov.ru, “About Rossotrudnichestvo.”

The Rossotrudnichestvo reference came in the last and most inflammatory dossier report:

[redacted] provided further details of these meeting/s and associated anti-CLINTON/Democratic Party operations. COHEN had been accompanied to Prague by 3 colleagues and the timing of the visit was either in the last week of August or the first week of September. One of their main Russian interlocutores was Oleg SOLODUKHIN, operating under Rossotrudnichestvo cover. According to [redacted], the agenda comprised questions on how deniable cash payments were to be made to hackers who had worked in Europe under Kremlin direction against the CLINTON campaign and various contingencies for covering up these operations and Moscow’s secret liaison with the TRUMP team more generally.

This doesn’t mean the Cohen reference is true!!
But it is another tidbit that suggests that, to the extent the dossier was filled with disinformation, it served to muddle actual events that happened.

According to the SSCI Report, Eric Trump wasn’t all that enticed by this offer (which appears to have had none of the improbable grandeur of the Sater deal).

Except they didn't bother to get him on the record saying that personally. It relied exclusively on Epshteyn's representation of the deal.

(U) Epshteyn recalled sharing these blueprints with Eric Trump and discussing the offer with him. 3000 According to Epshteyn, Eric Trump said that he would "take a look" and that the opportunity "[c]ould be interesting," but that his overall reaction was "extremely tepid."3001 Epshteyn claimed that nothing ever came of the offer.3002

(U) The Committee did not seek to interview Eric Trump. The Committee does not have further information related to what action, if any, was taken by the Trump Organization on the proposal.

And it did so even though it had evidence that Trump Organization was part of an organized effort to lie to the committee about a different Russian real estate deal, in part by withholding responsive documents.

So it's not, just, that SSCI declined to explain why it was so problematic from a counterintelligence standpoint that a Presidential candidate kept entertaining the kind of real estate deal in Russia he had been chasing for over a decade during the election, and at least two of those deals involved Russian intelligence operatives.

It's that for one of the deals – a deal that, if the redactions are any indication, poses significant counterintelligence concern – SSCI just didn't bother checking.

Ron Wyden has complained that the committee refused to follow the money of any of this. And with this fourth Trump Tower deal, they weren't even willing to demand they got the paper trail.